

# PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO OIL SPILLS

## IN THE ARCTIC

An oil spill in the Arctic can threaten vulnerable Arctic marine environments and coastal communities dependent on marine resources and ecosystems. In 2013, the eight Arctic States signed an agreement to help prepare and respond to marine oil pollution in the Arctic.

Until 2013, the Arctic Ocean was one of the few regions in the world not covered by an oil pollution and response agreement. This critical regulatory void was especially troublesome given the added challenges of responding to oil spills in Arctic waters. Recognizing the threat to vulnerable Arctic marine ecosystems and coastal communities, the eight Arctic States signed the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (MOSPA).

MOSPA strengthens emergency cooperation and coordination of Arctic oil spill response operations amongst the eight Arctic States. As part of MOSPA, Arctic States agreed to:

- maintain a national system to promptly and effectively respond to oil pollution incidents, including a minimum level of available oil spill response equipment, training procedures, and communication capabilities;
- share information about national authorities to facilitate effective communication across borders in case of an emergency;
- assess oil pollution incidents in the Arctic and immediately inform all Parties to the agreement whose interests could be affected;
- undertake appropriate monitoring activities to identify oil pollution incidents and expected environmental impacts.

Signatory states may request assistance from other Arctic States to respond to an oil pollution incident to:

- promote cooperation and exchange information to improve the effectiveness of oil pollution preparedness and response operations;
- carry out joint exercises and training, including notification or call-out exercises, table-top exercises, equipment deployment exercises, and other relevant activities.

### Arctic Council Activities

The Council's Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR) is responsible for maintaining the operational guidelines that implement MOSPA. In order to enhance response coordination under the MOSPA Agreement, EPPR created the Marine Environmental Response Experts Group (MER EG).

**EPPR assesses outcomes from MOSPA exercises** to develop corrective actions and recommendations to promote continuous improvement of the MOSPA Agreement and its operational guidelines.

**EPPR makes recommendations for future exercises, workshops, and training focus areas** based on MER EG's assessment of lessons learned and best practices from previous events.

**MER EG participates in activities and projects** specific to EPPR's MER roles and responsibilities and creates alignment with other fora and Working Groups as related to Arctic MER initiatives.

Case study:

# Practicing the worst case: A 2018 EPPR oil spill response exercise

The motor tanker MT FINTER, loaded with a cargo of heavy fuel oil, grounded on an underwater rock early morning on March 1, 2018 on its way to the port of Oulu in Finland. The grounding damaged the two starboard oil tanks, resulting in an estimated 2,000 – 3,000 tons of oil discharged into the ice and slush filled channel.

This is the scenario of the fourth tabletop exercise (TTX) that EPPR conducted within the framework of MOSPA, designed for validating and updating the agreement. The TTX was hosted by Finland in March 2018 and directed specifically at evaluating the protocols related to notifying parties of the agreement about an incident, as well as to requesting and offering assistance in case of an emergency.

The exercises are a tool to improve cooperation and coordination processes in the event of a real-world marine oil incident that could impact the Arctic States. EPPR's Marine Environmental Response Expert Group (MER) fully documents exercise objectives and lessons learned in an After-Action Report which is used to inform future exercises, areas of study and amendments to the MOSPA's Operational Guidelines.



*“It is basic knowledge that we can’t do everything alone, we need to work together. So, our ambition is to increase the existing good cooperation between the Arctic States.”*

*Jens Peter Holst-Andersen, EPPR Chair*

Under the Icelandic Chairmanship, an exercise scenario will again invoke the MOSPA. In cooperation with the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), The first live MOSPA exercise will take place in 2021. It will build upon past tabletop exercises and will benefit from the Planning Guidance for MOSPA Exercises, developed by EPPR during the Finnish Chairmanship.

## Recommendation

### Support for small communities

The Council's Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR) also develops products to serve small communities in the Arctic. EPPR recently developed a series of six education and outreach videos to help improve planning and readiness in the event of an oil spill. The videos focus on basic oil pollution response principles, planning for an initial community-based pollution response, and oil pollution risk and impacts to communities.

See the videos:  
[vimeo.com/eppr](https://vimeo.com/eppr)



Published March 2020



### For more information:

Jens Peter Holst-Andersen, EPPR Chair  
[jpg@fmn.dk](mailto:jpg@fmn.dk)

Dan Cowan, EPPR MER EG Chair  
[dan.cowan@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:dan.cowan@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)

[eppr.org](http://eppr.org)